

## Upper Wabash Nutrient Management Committee

September 4, 2009

### Notes

Participating: Mary Lou Renshaw, Angie Brown, Alan Stout, John Kessler, Larry Antosch, Ron James, Shannon Zezula, Laura Walker

1. Comments on Water Quality Credit Trading Workshop, August 26-27, 2009

Lou: got good basic understanding of water quality credit trading. Need water quality standards as driver.

Larry: Well done, diverse audience, people interested in what's happening

2. Salamonie Reservoir developments.

Angie: Army Corps concerned about algal blooms in reservoir. Asking are there producers exceeding their permit limits? Army Corps monitoring to determine source of nutrients. Wants to write a nutrient management plan for watershed around reservoir. Angie relayed to Lisa Underwood (USACE—Louisville) what is going on with our initiative in the Upper Wabash. Not as much algae in Mississinewa or Rousch.

Alan: need watershed management plans written to be eligible for grants—would be helpful if USACE would spearhead.

Laura: Corps could help with habitat issues?

Angie: Corps wanted to start long term monitoring for Salamonie. Interested in working with stakeholders on algal bloom issue—want to work upstream of reservoir—not entire 8 digit watershed.

What does USACE mean by watershed? They did not use the term however it sounds like they want to do a watershed plan.

USACE should participate in our coalition? Yes, see no downsides. **Angie will invite Lisa Underwood.**

Should we invite Indiana Farm Bureau? Yes

What about a replacement for Elizabeth Trybula (IASWCD)? **Lou will look up who is new person on the IASWCD's 319 contract.**

Cress: a representative of Indiana Farm Bureau did attend the first meeting at Bear Creek. Shannon suggested Mike Baise. Not sure of his position now.

Christa will contact IFB and IASWCD. Angie will contact Corps.

3. Priority practices to promote?

Lou: Are buffers the best strategy?

Shannon: Probably not. NRCS is focusing on cover crops, drainage management, promoting systems approach. Conservation partnership focusing on cover crops as well.

Laura: Cover crops are in the Mercer County plan.

Alan: Need to look at phosphorus as well as nitrogen. Cover crops sequester nutrients over the winter.

Lou: Where we had no-till is where we kept soil during last summer's flood.

Angie: There are Farm Bill programs related to each of our strategies. Is the adoption problem that we don't have enough money to offer adequate financial incentives, or is the problem that producers don't want to participate in the programs?

Shannon: NRCS issues tech note on how to incorporate manure into no-till system. Shannon will send copy to all.

Angie: How do we inform and educate people of what programs are available? What barriers are there? Source?

Need to know barriers.

Alan: Both issues are relevant. Information from SWCD board meetings and District Conservationists say that farmers are coming in applying for EQIP and they just found out about it after all this time.

Shannon: NRCS continues to educate partners on systems approach. Barry Fisher showing financial advantages for producers—still unfunded EQIP applications. More focus on agronomic practices rather than structures. Gauge success by new cover crop acre adoption. Research is finding good results with cover crops. Producers are seeing the benefits.

Angie: Over time, producers wanting to do conservation tillage, one of our strategies. Need reminders to producers all the time—making it somewhat of a norm—we “should be doing” cover crops/no-till

Is there something this committee can do to promote these practices in the watershed?

How do we reach the audience that hasn't gotten the message?

One answer is farmer-to-farmer communication. Focus on economics, soil quality, etc. Get key producers locally to talk to other producers.

Lou: parts of the state where we don't see adoption—why? Personalities of partners? Local folks must be on board—SWCD boards, tech service providers, etc.

Shannon: Need to educate NRCS employers and partners—make them comfortable with the practices and providing technical service to the farmers.

Lou: How has flooding affected the farmers' opinions of cover crops/no-till?

They are looking more at easements in the floodplain.

Shannon: much topsoil loss due to floods. Producers have no other option than to rebuild soil with new practices. However, the 2008 flood will soon be forgotten. Producers don't want to be in that situation. Have seen huge swings in cover crop adoption but not in no-till. Key is whoever talks to producers needs to be able to almost guarantee success.

Lou: in this watershed can we determine what the need is?

Shannon will pull up reports of which practices have been applied and planned. Backlog may not be easy to get.

Shannon: Upper Wabash in IN is more issue of producers asking for practices is not consistent across watershed.

Laura: In OH—EQIP funds used—could use more EQIP funds in Mercer County Wabash. Special CREP is needed.

Shannon: NRCS is rolling out Gulf Hypoxia Initiative. NRCS prioritizing practices/watersheds for mitigation of Gulf issues. Used set protocol to determine. Upper Wabash came out on top. Could lead to additional funding in watersheds to ramp up technical assistance and education. Could help make SWCDs aware of need.

Laura: In OH, not sure that watershed will be selected.

Would take local commitment to help with staffing on part of SWCDs, etc. List of practices, conservation cropping system, nutrient management, precision, cover crops, buffers for marginal lands, conservation tillage.

Alan: Indiana State Dept. of Ag has a certified livestock producer program—can we start a certified grain producer program? ISDA had added a person. Roz Leeck—looking at same. Those that apply for certification get experts to come onto the farm to see what improvements can be made. We could invite someone from certified crop advisers to participate in our coalition (contact Brian Peach—Cress will make contact)

Why would producer want to apply to become certified? Farmer gets reduction in insurance premium. They would also get assistance with any related problems. Some farmers are quite proud of what they do so pride is a factor.

Larry: Ohio Farm Bureau had 2006 grant dollars to develop producer self assessment tool—geared for non-livestock producer. One for row crop and one for specialty crop. At first workshop farmers learn to use the tool—at the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting they sit in with resource professionals to identify appropriate changes. Self awareness and self implementation. Better informed producers. It cuts down on time to identify solutions. When Conservation Security Program or drinking water funding or TMDL comes along, farmer is ready to apply for dollars. The materials for this program are developed but not computerized. Larry can share.

What kind of response did this program get?

5 or 6 pilot programs were held. Twenty producers in each. The problem was losing the producers after the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting—some did not return. Nice way of raising awareness on certain things farmers don't necessarily think about.

Idea: certified program could provide mailbox flags to recognize participants. Need to identify benefits to producer.

Alan: some consumers prefer to do business with producers who are "green" or sell certified products. Certification process (standards) for safety/environment, quality standards.

Larry: Some participants felt that it would be better if someone walked the farm with them to help with the self assessment. Barrier: Farmer thinks "what if I find something wrong and I have no finances to fix it?" Will I be penalized later? So they are reluctant to try to identify problems.

What would we like to focus on next meeting?

Laura: we need to show something to move forward, even a small step.

Ron: Upper Wabash River Basin Commission is hiring a coordinator. We need to take credit for what's going on. Promote attendance at a cover crop walk for example.

CTIC's need for OH farmers to pilot cover crops. Larry posted on OFB website. Laura forwarded names.

Angie: Promoting some of these efforts so producers can get this information is important. **Can send information on promotion ideas.**

Laura: does CTIC have a logo for this project?

**Christa will share dollar amounts in grant with group.**

Lou: need assessment of what's not happening in watershed, shown geographically and within what demographic groups. **Laura can provide from OH side.**

Who has source for developing logos? **Christa will contact Jerod Chew to see if Deb Fairhurst can help.**

Next meeting: October 2, 2009, 10:00 AM